

Message Text

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ACTION AF-06

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INR-07 NSAE-00 DHA-02 DODE-00 PRS-01 PA-02 SS-15

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FM AMEMBASSY GABORONE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6848

INFO AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG

AMEMBASSY MASERU

AMEMBASSY MBABANE

AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

UNCLAS GABORONE 1016

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ELAB, BC

SUBJECT: PRESIDENTIAL STATEMENT ON SELEBI-PIKWE STRIKE

REF: GABORONE 1008

1. THERE FOLLOWS THE TEXT OF THE STATEMENT BY PRESIDENT SIR
SERETSE KHAMA ON THE SUBJECT OF "ILLEGAL STRIKE IN BOTSWANA"
BROADCAST OVER RADIO BOTSWANA JULY 30:

2. BEGIN TEXT. " IT HAS BECOME NECESSARY FOR ME TO ADDRESS
THIS NATION ON A MATTER WHICH IS CAUSING GRAVE CONCERN TO MY
GOVERNMENT AND THAT IS THE ILLEGAL STRIKES IN BOTSWANA.

3. "ON MONDAY REPRESENTATIVES OF VARIOUS GROUPS OF WORKERS
AT THE SELEBI-PIKWE MINE MET WITH THE MANAGEMENT TO DISCUSS
COMPLAINTS ABOUT THE WAGES OF SOME OF THEM. THE MEETING WAS
ADJOURNED AND IT WAS AGREED THAT THEY WOULD MEET A DAY OR TWO

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LATER TO CONTINUE THE DISCUSSIONS.

4. "EARLY ON TUESDAY MORNING SIX PEOPLE GATHERED AT THE GATES OF THE MINE AND MANAGED TO PERSUADE THE OTHERS WHO WERE COMING TO WORK THAT THEY SHOULD GO ON STRIKE. EVENTUALLY A LARGE CROWD GATHERED AT THE GATES AND SOME OF THEM ENTERED THE MINE AND PLANT AREA AND FORCED ALL THOSE ON NIGHT SHIFT TO LEAVE THEIR WORK. THEY STONED THE CARES OF THE MINE MANAGER AND OTHER OFFICIALS WHEN THEY WERE FORCED TO LEAVE THE MINE. SMALL GROUPS OF IRRESPONSIBLE MEN ARMED WITH STICKS THEN PROCEEDED TO THE TOWNSHIP WHERE THEY FORCIBLY COMMANDEERED COMPANY MOTOR CARS, ASSAULTED SEVERAL MINE OFFICIALS AND EVEN ATTEMPTED TO INVADE ONE OF THE PRIMARY SCHOOLS.

5. "ON HEARING THIS I SENT THE VICE PRESIDENT AND THE MINISTER OF MINERAL RESOURCES AND WATER AFFAIRS AND EDUCATION TO SELEBI-PIKWE. THEY ATTEMPTED TO ADDRESS THE STRIKERS AT NOON BUT THEY WERE NOT GIVEN A HEARING AND IT BECAME NECESSARY TO USE THE POLICE MOBILE UNIT TO DISPERSE THE CROWD OF ABOUT 1,200 PEOPLE. FORTUNATELY, THE CROWD WAS DISPERSED IN TIME TO PREVENT MAJOR DAMAGE TO THE SMELTER AT THE PLANT. IF ACCESS HAD BEEN DENIED TO THE TECHNICIANS FOR ANY LONGER PERIOD VERY SUBSTANTIAL DAMAGE WOULD HAVE BEEN DONE TO THE SMELTER AND IT WOULD HAVE BEEN NECESSARY TO CLOSE DOWN THE WHOLE MINING OPERATION FOR AT LEAST SIX MONTHS. THIS ACTION WOULD NOT ONLY HAVE DEPRIVED OVER 2,000 BATSWANA OF THEIR JOBS FOR SIX MONTHS BUT WOULD ALSO HAVE CAUSED CONSIDERABLE HARM TO THE EXONOMY OF BOTSWANA.

6. "THE ESTABILISHMENT OF SELEBI-PIKWE COST R250 MILLION, OF WHICH R60 MILLION WAS BORROWED FROM VARIOUS OVEREAS YMLLCES BY GOVERNMENT. THE MINE HAS BEEN RUNNING AT LOST OF R3 MILLION A MONTH AND JUST WHEN IT APPEARED THAT THE VARIOUS TECHNICAL PROBLEMS WERE NEARLY SOLVED, THE IRRESPONSIBLE ACTION OF HANDFUL OF BATSWAMA HAS CAUSED A COMPLETE CLOSE DOWN WHICH WILL FURTHER DELAY THE DAY WHEN THE MINE WILL BECOME PROFITABLE.

7. "IT IS ESSENTIAL FOR BOTSWANA' DEVELOPMENT THAT WE SHOULD CONTINE TO RETAIN FOREIGN INVESTMENT AND ATTRACT MUCH MORE SUCH INVESTMENT. IT IS ALSO NECESSARY FOR US TO IMPORT EXPATRIATE SKILLS TO AID US IN OUR DEVELOPMENT. THIS CAN ONLY BE DONE IF THE COMPANIES WHO INVEST HERE OBTAIN REASONABLE RETURN ON THEIR UNCLASSIFIED

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INVESTMENTS AND IF THE SKILLED EXPATRIATES FEEL THAT THEIR LIVES AND PROPERTY ARE SAFE. GOVERNMENT HAS ACTIVELY ENCOURAGED THE FORMATION AND GROWTH OF OUR TRADE UNIONS. IT HAS ALSO PROVIDED ADEQUATE MACHINERY FOR THE SETTLEMENT OF DISPUTES. HOWEVER IN SPITE OF ALL THIS, ILLEGAL AND UNNECESSARY STRIKES HAVE CONTINUED TO SUCH AN EXTENT THAT BOTSWANA WILL LOSE ITS REPUTATION AS A STABLE AND A SAFE COUNTRY IN WHICH TO INVEST MONEY.

8. "THE NUMBER OF BATSWANA EMPLOYED IN MINING AND INDUSTRY CONSTITUTES A VERY SMALL PART OF OUR TOTAL LABOR FORCE. FOR EVERY MOTSWANA WHO IS EMPLOYED IN THESE SECTORS E AT LEAST FIVE OTHERS WHO WOULD LIKE TO BE SIMILARLY EMPLOYED BUT ARE FORCED TO SEEKOUT A LIVING IN THE RURAL AREAS OR SEEK EMPLOYMENT OUTSIDE BOTSWANA GOVERNMENT IS COMMITTED TO THE SHARING OUT OF THE REVENUE DERIVED FROM MINING AND INDUSTRY AMONG ALL BATSWANA. A STRIKE AT SELEBI-PIKWE, ORAPA, MORUPULE OR ELSEWHERE, THEREFORE, DOES NOT ONLY HARM THE COMPANIES WHO OWN THE UNDERTAKINGS BUT BOTSWANA AS A WHOLE.

9. "FOR THIS REASON, MY GOVERNMENT HAS DECIDED THAT IT WILL NO LONGER TOLERATE THE FLOUTING OF OUR LAWS BY A GROUP OF MISGUIDED INDIVIDUALS. THE PROCEDURE FOR SETTLING DISPUTES IS CLEARLY LAID DOWN IN OUR LAWS AND ANY PERSON WHO IGNORES THESE PROCEDURES WILL HENCEFORTH BE PUNISHED.

10. "I AM AWARE THAT THE LARGE MAJORITY OF WORKERS DO NOT WISH TO PARTICIPATE IN THESE STRIKES BUT ARE INTIMIDATED INTO DOING SO BY A HARD CORE OF POLITICALLY MOTIVATEDINDIVIDUALS. I HAVE REASON TO BELIEVE THAT THESE STRIKES ARE INSTIGATED BY THESE INDIVIDUALS NOT BECAUSE THEY ARE INTERESTED IN THE WELFARE OF THE WORKERS BUT BECAUSE THEY HOPE TO REAP POLITICAL REWARDS FROM THE CHAOS WHICH COULD RESULT.

11. "I WANT TO MAKE IT QUITE CLEAR THAT MY GOVERNMENT IS NOT PREPARED TO COUNTENANCE ANY MORE SUBVERSION OF THIS NATURE. I AM WARNING THESE INDIVIDUALS THAT UNLESS THEY CEASE THEIR ACTIVITIES FORTHWITH I WILL BE OBLIGED TO TAKE SUCH ACTION AS IS NECESSARY TO DEPRIVE THEM OF THE OPPORTUNITY TO CAUSE FURTHER HARM.

12. "THE BDP GOVERNMENT IS DEDICATED TO IMPROVING THE STANDARD
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OF LIVING OF ALL BATSWANA AND TO ENSURE THAT THEY AND ALL THE EXPATRIATS WE NEED TO ASSIT IN OUR DEVELOPMENT CAN LIVE HERE WITHOUT FEAR. WE WILL NOT ALLOW THE FEW SELF-SEEKERS TO JEOPARDIZE THE PEACE, STABILITY AND DEVELOPMENT OF BOTSWANA.

13. "THE MANGAGEMENT OF BCL HAS DECIDED THAT THOSE WORKERS WHO DID NOT PERFORM THEIR DUTIES DURING THIS PRIOD HAVE BY THEIR OWN ACTIONS TERMINATED THEIR EMPLOYMENT WITH THE COMPANY. WHEN THE COMPANY IS READY TO RE-COMMENCE OPERATING THE MINE IT WILL CONSIDER RE-EMPLOYING THOSE WORKERS WHO RE-APPLY FOR EMPLOYMENT. HOWEVER THE COMPANY IS NOT OBLIGED TO RE-EMPTY ANY OF THE WORKERS. IT IS ENTIRELY IN THE DISCRETION OF THE COMPANY WHO IS RE-EMPLOYED. GOVERNMENT WHOLEHEARTEDLY SUPPORTS THE COMPANY'S STAND IN THIS MATTER.

14. "IN CONCLUSION, I MUST EMPHASIZE THAT THE COUNTRY EXPECTS THE FEW BATSWANA WHO ARE FORTUNATE ENOUGH TO FIND RELATIVELY WELL PAID EMPLOYMENT IN MINING, COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY TO APPRECIATE THAT THEY HAVE A DUTY TO SHARE THEIR GOOD FORTUNE WITH THEIR FELLOW BATSWANA AND TO ENSURE THAT WE MAINTAIN LAW AND ORDER, WITHOUT WHICH THERE WILL BE NO DEVELOPMENT. I MUST ALSO REPEAT MY WARNING TO THOSE WHO USE OTHER PEOPLE TO ACHIEVE THEIR OWN POLITICAL ENDS THAT MY PATIENCE HAS COME TO AND END".
END TEXT.

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